

# Instructors' Use of Snark Impacts College Students' Learning Experience

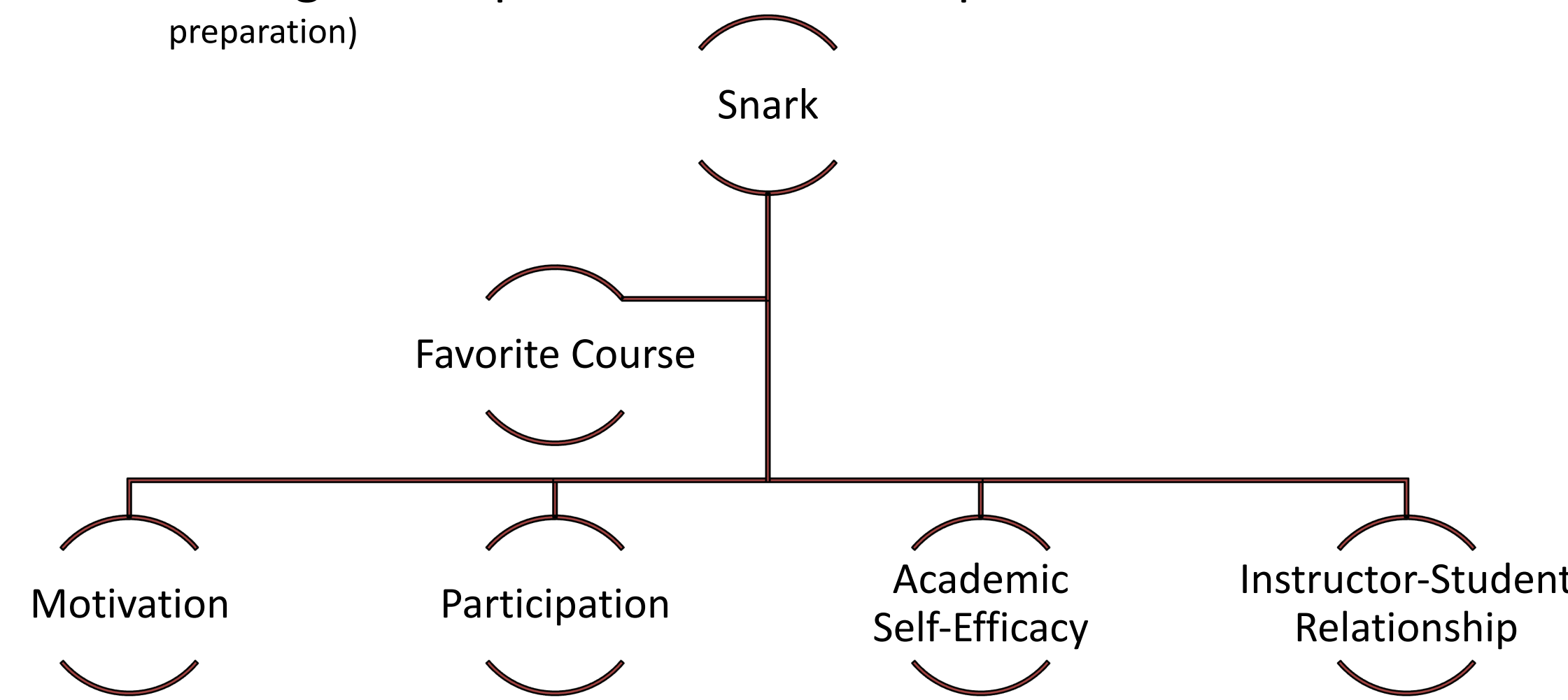
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## Introduction

- Snark is “a form of verbal, face-to-face aggression that involves using negative, ad hominem, sarcastic or non-literal humor to diminish and disarm the victim” (Massey, 2021, p. 15)
- Snark is a fairly new construct in academia and has only been studied in friendships
- Instructional Humor Processing Theory posits that instructors' use of inappropriate humor (i.e., snark) elicits negative responses from students (Wanzer et al., 2010)
- Effective (i.e., non-aggressive) instructional communication is associated with:
  - Greater student motivation (Myers & Goodboy, 2014)
  - Greater student participation (Myers et al., 2007)
  - Stronger interpersonal relationships (Massey, 2021; Parker & Massey, in preparation)



## Research Questions

RQ<sub>1-4a</sub>: Is instructors' snark use associated with:

- 1a) Motivation?
- 2a) Participation?
- 3a) Academic self-efficacy?
- 4a) Instructor-student relationship?

RQ<sub>1-4b</sub>: Does the association between instructors' snark use and these outcomes (1-4a) differ according to whether participants report on their favorite or least favorite course?

## Method

- Participants ( $N = 261$ ) were recruited through The University of Alabama Psychology Subject Pool ( $M_{Age} = 18.52$ ,  $SD_{Age} = 1.05$ ; 82% Female; 82% White)

Construct	Measure	# Items	Sample Item
Snark	Adapted Version of Relationship Snark Scale (RSS) (Massey, 2021)	4	"Student C interrupted you in the middle of instruction"
Motivation	State Motivation Scale (Christophel, 2009)	12	"Don't want to study / Want to study"
Participation	Student Course Engagement Questionnaire: Participation/Interaction Engagement Subscale (Handelsman et al., 2005)	6	"Raising my hand in class"
Academic Self-Efficacy	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire: Self-Efficacy Subscale (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990)	9	"I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class"
Instructor-Student Relationship	Student-Instructor Relationship Scale: Instructor Connectedness Subscale (Creasey et al., 2009)	11	"I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor"

## Analytic Strategy

### Preliminary Analyses: Descriptives and Correlations

- Means, SDs, and ranges were computed for all constructs of interest
- Bivariate correlations were calculated

### RQ<sub>1-4a</sub>: Association between Snark and Student Outcomes

- Multiple linear regression models
- Main effect of snark
- Controlled for gender (0 = *Male*), race (0 = *White*), year in school (0 = *1<sup>st</sup> year*), and favorite/least favorite course (0 = *Least favorite*)
- $\hat{Y} = B_0 + B_1 * \text{Female} + B_2 * \text{Non-white} + B_3 * \text{Year} + B_4 * \text{FavoriteCourse} + B_5 * \text{Snark}$

### RQ<sub>1-4b</sub>: Moderation of Favorite Course between Snark and Student Outcomes

- Multiple linear regression models
- $\hat{Y} = B_0 + B_1 * \text{Female} + B_2 * \text{Non-white} + B_3 * \text{Year} + B_4 * \text{FavoriteCourse} + B_5 * \text{Snark} + B_6 * \text{Snark} * \text{FavoriteCourse}$

## Results

**Table 1. Bivariate Correlations between Snark and Student Outcomes**

	Snark
1. Snark	-
<b>Demographics</b>	
2. Gender (1 = Female)	0.15*
3. Race (1 = Non-White)	0.03
4. School Year (in credits)	0.04
5. Favorite Course	-0.35*
<b>Student Outcomes</b>	
6. Motivation	-0.24*
7. Participation	-0.12
8. Self Efficacy	-0.20*
9. Instructor-Student Relationship	-0.39*

\*  $p < .05$

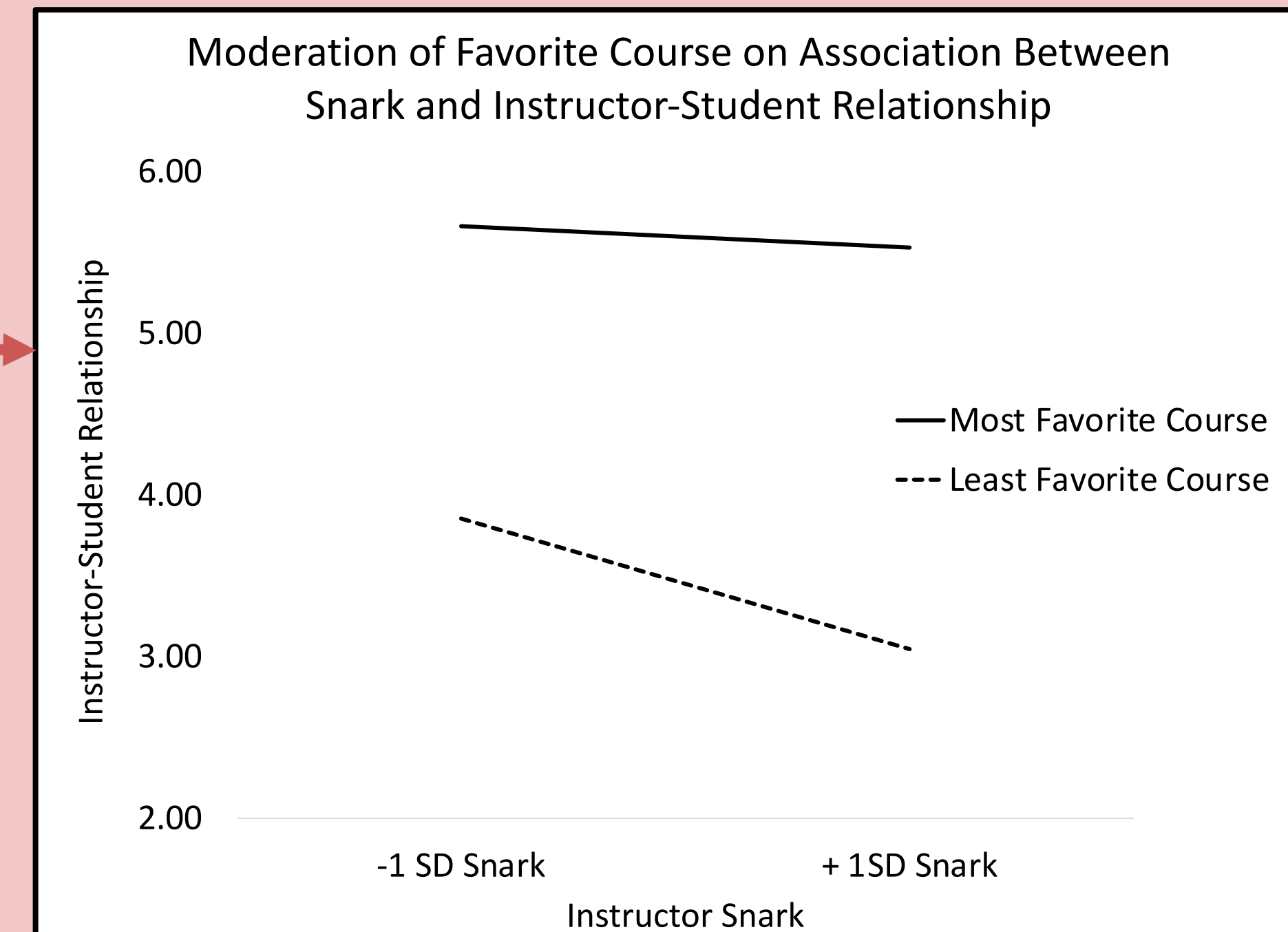
Instructor snark was negatively correlated with student motivation, self-efficacy, and instructor-student relationship. However, instructor snark was not correlated with participation.

**Table 2. Regression Models Predicting Student Outcomes by Instructor Snark and Moderation of Snark by Favorite Course**

	Motivation		Participation		Academic Self-Efficacy		Instructor-Student Relationship									
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2								
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE								
Intercept	3.50	0.20	3.49	0.20	2.72	0.16	2.71	0.16	5.04	0.23	5.04	0.23	3.43	0.21	3.45	0.21
Gender (1 = Female)	0.06	0.20	0.04	0.20	-0.27	0.16	-0.29	0.16	-0.20	0.22	-0.20	0.22	-0.24	0.20	-0.22	0.20
Race (1 = Non-White)	-0.36	0.19	-0.37*	0.19	-0.15	0.15	-0.16	0.15	-0.10	0.22	-0.10	0.22	-0.28	0.20	-0.27	0.20
School Year	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.14	0.12	0.14	0.12	0.04	0.11	0.03	0.11
Favorite Course	1.65*	0.15	1.61*	0.15	0.79*	0.12	0.75*	0.12	0.75*	0.17	0.74*	0.18	2.10*	0.16	2.15*	0.16
Snark	-0.03	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.05	-0.08	0.06	-0.07	0.07	-0.19*	0.05	-0.27*	0.07
Snark*Favorite Course			-0.21	0.11			-0.15	0.08			-0.03	0.12			0.22*	0.11
Adjusted R-Square	0.36		0.37		0.14		0.15		0.09		0.09		0.50		0.51	

Instructor snark was associated with poorer instructor-student relationships

Instructor snark was most impactful for students' relationship with their instructor in their least favorite course



## Discussion

- Initial hypotheses (RQ<sub>4</sub>) were partially supported:
  - Snark was negatively associated with instructor-student relationship when controlling for covariates
    - This association was stronger for students reporting on their least favorite course
  - Snark was not associated with motivation, participation, or self-efficacy
- Instructor snark was associated with relational outcomes (i.e., instructor-student relationship) but not students' academic outcomes (i.e. motivation, participation, and self-efficacy)
  - This could be due to snark being a communication technique, which is a large component of relationships
- Findings are consistent with studies indicating that snark is a problematic conflict management technique that can create a heightened risk for difficulties in friendships (Massey, 2021; Parker & Massey, in preparation)
- This study extends the literature on snark to educational contexts

### Limitations

- Additional characteristics may be associated with these outcomes (e.g., class size, subject, etc.)
- Effect of favorite course was very strong
- Reliance upon self-report measures

### Future Research Directions

- How does snark present in student-to-student interactions?
- Are these associations the same with K-12 teachers and students?
- Are these associations the same regardless of the target of snark?

## Implications

- Results indicate that instructor snark does not impact the student learning experience as much as expected
- Humor should be used tactfully in the classroom
- Instructors may benefit from reflecting upon their patterns of communication with students

## References

Scan the QR code for references



## Acknowledgements

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Scan the QR code for more info on the WITY Lab!

